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Nate Novak Reflection 3

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Professor Román-Odio

Cultural Productions of the Borderlands

14 November 2017

Reflection 3: Articulated Learning

I learned that every child born into any particular borderland—which may manifest itself through geographic, socioeconomic, political, or emotional dimensions— has the potential to rise out of their current situation of being an endangered culture. People, particularly children, who are trapped either by physical or institutional borders should not be forgotten, and **I have learned that they too are an integral part of our society, and when we allow them to perish with low incomes, poor health care, and substandard education, not only do we perpetuate their living border experience, but we waste their vast array of talents.** We have a massive part of our society not contributing to the United States. I have learned that when these people lose out on the many opportunities we have—stable families, quality education, and consistent incomes—we as United States citizens lose out on their massive potential to add to the United States experience.

To be clear, what is meant by these individuals missing out on the opportunities that I and others enjoy is that these children reflect what it means to be living in an endangered culture. An endangered culture is one in which a culture's values, symbols, institutions, and very existence are at in a state of crisis, which manifests itself through marginalization and trauma. In many instances, these children do not have stable families, parents with high, or even average, incomes, and access to quality education that meets their needs. That is not to say Columbia is not providing the children with what they need; Columbia is offering the children a wonderful

positive environment to learn and grow. **However, eventually they must leave Columbia Elementary, and we as a society must ensure they continue to learn in a similarly positive environment so they may continue on their upward trajectory from a very low situation.** As I noted above, the children have so much potential to leave this situation of a lived border experience. When I worked with them, they were engaged and eager to learn. They demonstrated a powerful ability to learn and empathize with others. These are key traits for people to become successful and productive members of society in any capacity.

Frankly, it is not until I take the time to reflect on the experience that I understand the relationships between the CEL experience and the border theory we have been discussing in class. When I am living the experience, it is all about submitting my lesson plans, getting to the school on time, engaging the children, and getting back to campus. Only through reflection have I become completely aware of the situation the children are in and how we may be changing it in some abstract, hopefully impactful way. **It is through reflection upon the experience that I can truly learn from it and grow as a citizen, public servant, and student.** While growth as a student and public servant are important, I submit that growth as a citizen is the most powerful of transformations resulting from the experience, as growing as a citizen allows me to more fully empathize with marginalized populations in the United States and the world, an incredible impactful trait. Through reflection of the experience, I more fully understand these children's position and can help offer solutions to allow them to rise above their endangered culture and break through the borderland they experience.

This learning can be used in a multitude of situations. I understand that just because an individual may not have the economic means to support themselves, that does not mean they do not have the potential to rise above their situation, they may just need a little help. Such learning

is powerful in everyday decisions on politics, charity, and volunteer work. This experience has shown that to be a faithful citizen, we must give back to our communities and give others the help they need, particularly when they live a border experience.

These realizations came to light in a number of situations. The first that comes to mind is when the children were responding to Isabella and I during discussion of the literature. The six children we taught understood that race should not be a factor in how others are treated. For me, this indicates that racism is a learned behavior. **These children have no thoughts of racism, noting the characters' work ethic, bravery, and resilience and seeing the characters beyond their superficial characteristics such as class and race.** The children also empathized with the conditions of the characters, understanding the different hardships they endured such as bullying and exclusion, among other various types of ways borderlands were expressed in the literature. The children also impressed me with their incredible retention of the material. They drew connections to stories and poems that we read weeks before, demonstrating their ability to retain knowledge of relatively complex themes over a long period of time.

The realizations came to light also through the children expressing themselves creatively. The kids loved to draw and they created a variety of poignant drawings of the scenes from the material, often relating it to their own lives either visually within the drawing or verbally to the whole group. The kids thus demonstrated their learning and creative abilities to the whole group, showing their potential to escape their personal borderlands felt through the endangered culture in which they live.

Learning that the children have the potential to rise out of their endangered culture and escape the borderland in which they live has incredible value in the situation. **This is because we as a class can reinforce in their minds the fact that they matter to society's development as**

well. While we engage with them, not only can we make them *feel* listened to, but rather make them actually *listened to*. We can continue to actively engage with them, as they may struggle due to internal and external factors. We can be one external factor in their life that brings them confidence and peace of mind to allow them to grow internally in profound ways. There is immense value for the children as they are able to learn in a new environment they may not have experienced before: around people in college, who are old enough for them to look up to but not too old so as to feel at the mercy of a teacher/student power dynamic. This allows them to express themselves in novel, meaningful ways. This, of course, has no monetary value. Not because it is worthless, but because we cannot place a value on the confidence, happiness, or vast potential of a child in their position.

In broader terms, the learning from the experience can be applied to a number of scenarios. **Understanding the importance of helping those who have fallen victim to endangered cultures and borderlands, and that they have the potential to escape these situations, has immense value when considering political decisions.** This knowledge will incline me to vote for public officials that represent the subjugated, disenfranchised, and marginalized, fighting for their needs. This knowledge also has immense value in being a better public servant by volunteering my time to help others who experience similar situations to the children of Columbia. I will be better suited to understand their issues and to help by being part of the solution.

In almost six months from now, I will have graduated from Kenyon (God willing). When out of an environment such as Kenyon, where everyone is conscious of social issues, it will be easy to fall into a trap of ignorance about the issues facing marginalized peoples. It is also very easy to not spend time volunteering as part of the solution to these issues. My goal for after

Kenyon is to spend at least one hour per week to help tutor children or be a mentor to a potentially at risk child. Through this simple, yet impactful task, I will be able to continue the work I began at Columbia and help more individuals escape their situation of a lived borderland, helping dismantle both tangible and intangible borders alike. However, there will be challenges to achieving this goal. One such challenge, as mentioned earlier, is not being surrounded by people who care about these social issues, thus causing me to not feel the need to help the community at large. Additionally, working long days at a white collar job can be mentally and emotionally draining, the rat races may make me feel less inclined to take action. However, I believe I will be disciplined in achieving this goal because I understand that the benefits to the individual and society at large are so great that it will be worth overcoming the obstacles.

In light of this learning I will attempt to achieve my goal. This goal is of the utmost importance because when the actions of a few individuals are aggregated, they have a powerfully positive effect on society. When we as a society are able to act on behalf of the marginalized, the endangered cultures, and those who experience borderlands, they can realize their full potential, allowing them to escape the situation which we are responsible for putting them in.